

**STATEMENT OF MS. RANDI RHODES
ON THE STATE OF THE MEDIA**

FORUM ON MEDIA BIAS AND THE FREEDOM OF SPEECH

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Thank you Congressman Conyers for calling together media professionals who have worked their entire adult lives in media and understand that the news has been Canceled. The American Press is far from Free today.

First: Political litmus tests, are as common as loyalty oaths in my business. If you are a conservative there is room on the dial, in the news rooms and on the cable channels for you, (provided you have the right jewelry and hairdresser.) If you are a liberal, and your life's dream was to report news, anchor news or be an investigative journalist, you will live to see day after day, your stories censored, edited, or just killed. Corporate and government interference in reporting the news can also effect journalists who have no particular political agenda. They simply report the facts as they find them. If these facts are inconvenient or unflattering to the Majority Party agenda they can be accused of being an accessory to murder.

Just this past week the White House decided to call Newsweek Magazine an accessory to murder for printing a story of Koran abuse that the IRCC has clearly documented for more than three years, in more than three countries. Cuba, Afghanistan and Iraq. Journalists need Congress to Act to protect their right to report freely.

News is essential for a vibrant participatory Democracy to continue to work and serve all who are lucky enough to be naturalized or born here. Unfortunately the forces at work are dumbing down the citizens AND IT IS BY DESIGN. How can anyone explain to a sane viewer that on the second day of Republicans and Democrats battling out the way the Senate will advise and consent to judicial nominees the lead story on ABC World News Tonight was Star Wars bootlegging. On the second day of Republicans invoking something called the "Nuclear Option" -- So named because the fallout will be so devastating to democracy as we know it and will shape the judiciary for decades to come, the lead story on Fox News was two missing kids in Idaho.

CNN's Lou Dobbs was the only broadcaster who did a real newscast that covered the filibuster and Senator Rick Santorum's remarks on the floor of the Senate today comparing Democrats to Adolf Hitler in 1942. In his half hour newscast Lou Dobbs managed to tell me that North Korea came to the table for the first time to discuss their nuclear status. They won't talk to the American President but they will talk to South Korea. He was able to report that today on Capitol Hill FBI Director Robert Mueller asked Congress for increased power to subpoena personal records from employers without judicial review. I was grateful for that newscast. I am grateful to Jim Lehrer for doing a real fact based hour long newscast each night. But these two news broadcasts shouldn't be the exception. These should be the standard we hold all newscasts to. Report what happened today, while I was working, or while you raised your children.

On a day when America has ground troops fighting in two foreign wars and the US Senate is debating the way America confirms life time appointments to the Federal Judiciary only two

newscasts told me some of the news. Missing from the broadcasts are the two wars we are sending our young ones to fight.

Do Americans know we are in two wars? Do we have a succinct answer when asked why we are at war? Shouldn't it be self evident to every American the reasons for 1,600 dead American soldiers? Shouldn't we know what has happened to 15,000 severely wounded? How can Americans vote for the person who best represents their interests when there is no mention about whether or not democracy is being spread as the President says? People aren't stupid, they are just tired of searching for information that seldom comes. Do you think this is what the public wants? To ignore our successes in Afghanistan and Iraq? To ignore our men and women in uniform? To never celebrate them or their accomplishments? To not be able to see what is being done in our name for good or bad? To not support the troops because we don't know what they need? To not even have a basic grasp on why we are at war?

The dumbing down of America is by design. The less people know the happier this Administration and its loyalists are. An educated middle class is not in the best interests of a one party government. Censored media is an earmark of every country that is not free today. The one common denominator is a rigged press.

The public is most useful to the power elite when their boredoms are entertained and their curiosity ended. When they stop believing the news is real news people stop caring about anything but their own survival. When free people are encouraged to just get on with their lives without critical information to make their lives meaningful it is the beginning of the end of personal decision making, and personal freedom.

Now some will argue that corporate news answers to the bottom line. It must turn a profit or it cannot continue to produce and broadcast the news. Let's explore the theory of the "marketplace decides".

If a free market place and the bottom line profit of a news corporation was at the heart of the bias we see against reporting news, if it were simply just a profit center, and the corporate news was giving the people what they really want by CANCELING the news and replacing it with infotainment, celebrity gossip and runaway brides as you are told by these Captains of industry, than Fox News would simply not exist. What do I mean by that? Well in the past six months, Fox News has lost 58% of it's viewership. In the most recent ratings period available, April 2005 Fox News claims only 455,000 viewers in their target demographic of 25 -54 Persons. If it was just a question of profits, tell me...how are they making money with so few viewers and such high priced journalists? They can't, and they don't. And it isn't just Fox or CNN whose viewership is very small about 277,000 viewers in primetime, people have decided the news has been cancelled and so they do not watch. Nor do they trust the news to report the most important stories of the day. Americans are not stupid, they know that they are being lied to and that the news is censored.

Admit for the record please.

CHART of and CNN Ratings

<http://www.mediabistro.com/tvnewser/original/demotrend1.pdf>Fox

Primetime ratings for Fox and CNN

<http://www.mediabistro.com/tvnewser/original/demotrend2.pdf>

So what is really going on? Certainly not good business. Corporate news has simply become propaganda for a Republican majority today, a Republican majority tomorrow, a Republican majority forever. If it is overt propaganda perhaps they are entitled to do exactly that but they shouldn't be able to brand it as NEWS. If there is covert propaganda than we already have laws to enforce.

As an American consumer of news I have been cheated and lied to. I have the right to a free press, free of government sanctions for reporting what is true. Journalists have the right to be watchdogs and report the facts without retribution from their employers, or the government. Access to public policy makers should not be a quid pro quo situation. The White House, The Congress, The US Supreme Court should never be allowed to take away access if a reporter does not file a favorable news story. If a public figure does something that affects the public, it should be the unvarnished facts as we find them, without fear of retaliation or sanction. The Federal Government should promote a market place free from sanctions for a complete and vibrant newscast. Journalism should be free to fully inform the public. This is not the case today.

Factors like media deregulation have caused the power of information to be in too few hands. Managing a few corporate titans into muzzling their reporters is easier than managing a thousand owners of the public airwaves. Cable news doesn't even bother to compete anymore. It just repeats over and over whatever favors the corporate business that may be before this Congress or the FCC. This is an enormous problem. Perhaps it is best for their business to not disseminate real information. Ok. Than they must not brand themselves News. They must brand themselves Opinion shows, or talk shows, or something other than news. The word news ought to mean something. It suggests a public trust. And in fact, news broadcasts have always been an essential tool for the democratic process to thrive. Perhaps the goal is more corporatism and less democracy. Maybe I'm wrong, but there is one way to find out. Standards must be put in place for anyone who wishes to brand themselves as News Broadcasters.

Standards that guarantee a free press. A press that is free to report without being accused of murdering people by the White House. No Party Leader should be allowed to threaten an industry with unfavorable legislation if a story whose facts show lapses in ethics, or lies about war, or any fact that is unflattering. Broadcast News must be free to show the American wars. Or free to talk about Real ID being shoved into a War Spending Bill. Free to report prisoner abuse, casualty counts or abuse of religious documents without penalty.

Americans must be able to trust this information. News has to be held to a higher standard of accuracy than opinion. News is a recounting of facts...things that happened today when you were working or raising your children. News is made everyday and yet to watch the news you would think only one child went missing in America, or only one woman got cold feet before her wedding, that only celebrity justice matters. You would never know that Tom DeLay used The Department of Homeland Security to hunt down legislators that he disagreed with. Nor would you know that General Abizaid finds the mess in Iraq getting worse, not better. Where are the voices of our soldiers? What is the situation in Afghanistan. Where are the pictures?

Since the beginning of broadcasting people believed that if this was a newscast you were going to hear the most important events of the day, see the photos and hear the facts as they were found.

For example:

These are the facts of the war. Here are the faces of the men who fell today. This is the state of the union tonight. The President was asked tough questions today, complete with meaningful follow-ups. I don't know one journalist working today who is unafraid to ask a difficult question. Getting a White House Press Pass is as easy as promising to ask softball questions and eat up time. Asking a hard question and being afforded a follow up question is off limits. In some cases, journalists who cover the White House have been relegated to the back row where they will never be called on again.

I am here today to convince you that there is an essential need to guarantee that our press, especially TV News organizations (because if it isn't on TV it didn't happen) are allowed to perform this meaningful public service of informing and capturing events so that an educated electorate prevails in all of their endeavors.

As you know a free press is the Fourth Estate in democracy. It is essential for religious freedom, free markets, human rights and good government. Over 60 years ago Eleanor Roosevelt and Wendell Wilkie founded an organization called Freedom House. It was designed to be a watchdog looking around the world for indications of eroding democratic principles as well as an organization that promotes freedom and democracy. As such, it monitors a key factor in vibrant democracies...THE MEDIA.

<http://www.freedomhouse.org/aboutfh/index.htm>

Freedom House to this day remains a bipartisan organization of leading Democrats and Republicans, business and labor leaders, scholars, writers and journalists and whose Board Chairman James Woolsey has served two Republican Presidents and two Democratic Presidents (probably best known to most Americans as the former CIA Director.) As a leading proponent of democratic values and it's steadfast opposition to dictatorships of the far left and far right it has always concerned itself with MEDIA.

The most current survey of free countries, partly free countries and not free countries has just been released. In Global Press Freedom Rankings for 2005 The United States media is ranked 29th in the world. 29th. The leading exporter of "democracy" is ranked 29th in Freedom of the Press.

<http://www.freedomhouse.org/research/pressurvey/allscore2005.pdf>

Latvia, Barbados and Palau beat us.

So what can we do?

First, Congress must act to adopt standards for labeling a broadcast, News.

For the health of the American people we've insisted on labeling food. Pick up any packaged

food and you will see how many grams of fat, carbohydrates, sodium etc. It's just so people can make choices. They don't have to be good choices, but they know what they're putting in their bodies. Yet the American mind is left to wonder, is this news or commentary? Am I listening to opinion or am I hearing facts. What did Congress accomplish today. What are the facts about judicial filibusters? Genuine newscasts cast out rhetoric and inform with facts. Facts that educate us so we can decide which direction we really want to go. News isn't bumper sticker slogans and angry rhetoric. It's information pure and simple. It is supposed to open our world not close our minds.

How does an average American begin to digest what Congress did today if no one will tell them? Can a working man understand who stole his pension if it's not reported? Do Americans know that The Real ID act has passed and that it will require them to enter into a National Data Base complete with biometric information, within 3 years if they want to travel on an airplane? Do they know that there was no debate on the issue and that it was shoved into a Supplemental Spending Bill for Iraq? Have we liberated Afghan women? Can we see their progress? Where are the interviews? Where are the pictures? What are we doing to bring Osama Bin Laden to justice? How much of America do foreign countries own? How do we go about making economic decisions about our families if we don't know why gas is so expensive, or where the new economic opportunities are? Where are the progress reports on Homeland Security? If we've not made any improvements why aren't we told? Don't I deserve to know if a chemical plant 14 miles upwind is secure?

There is a right to a free press expressly guaranteed to each and every one of us, and yet there are no standards for corporations who brand themselves as news providers. We had standards for sitcom families and their sleeping arrangements. We have language standards for radio stations, but no news standards that define what journalistic principles must be present in order to brand as news.

Second, I think we need to bring back the fairness doctrine which served this country well from 1949 through 1987. It simply guarantees competing viewpoints on issues of public importance. There's never been an Equal Time requirement as is widely believed. We viewed station licensees to be "public trustees" and therefore, they had an obligation to present different viewpoints on issues of public importance. License holders were also required to actively seek out stories of interest to the public and air programs addressing those issues.

<http://www.museum.tv/archives/etv/F/htmlF/fairnessdoct/fairnessdoct.htm>

I found the Fairness Doctrine in the museum of TV archives. Dust it off and put it back on the public shelf.

I believe as Bill Moyers does, that anyone can buy anything they can afford, cars, boats, homes, vacations even education, but no one is entitled to buy more democracy than me, or you. These propaganda machines crank out logos that say news, people who pose as journalists, slogans that convey the impression that journalism is practiced here, but there are no standards to either prove or disprove that this is what they are truly engaged in. We need standards if you want to call yourself news. News should mean something very important. It should include the ability to trust this report as being pure fact.

Third and finally we need to protect our journalists. They must be free to report and never be penalized with lost access to the people they cover or with retribution from partisan employers. Journalists have died covering Afghanistan and Iraq in numbers that surpass the 20 years of coverage they selflessly performed in Viet Nam. This Congress must honor them with the protection they deserve in order to bring those stories home to air. They must also be free to report on the powerful who shape our policies both here and abroad without fear.

This is the 21st Century. It is the Information Age, and Gentle Ladies and Gentlemen, we are 29th in the world for a free press. The news has been cancelled. I came here today to ask that Congress recognize the need to act on these three basic remedies.

Information is the coin of the realm.

If you fail to act, the public will never know that we are the party of ideas. That we are the party of business and labor. That we are the party of education and health. That we are the party of personal privacy and open government. That we are the party of freedom and justice. And that we understand how to gain economic freedom for all and part of that first step toward a richer life is getting the information you deserve.

If you fail to act, I will be a member of a minority party for a very long time, that is if the two party system can survive this new propaganda machine called the news.

Thank you for listening.